

READ OTHER SIDE FIRST.

(Some of us who signed the opposite page have encouraged Mel Packer to openly state his political beliefs for the record. Our endorsement of the opposite side is in no way an endorsement of his political philosophy as explained below, but we do endorse his right to believe as he chooses. Thank you for reading this.)

A PERSONAL STATEMENT

My name is Mel Packer and I am a member of Local 249, employed by Consolidated Freightways. I have been in 249 for about 5 years and was in 299 in Detroit before that.

I was raised in a working class family in Connecticut where my father has retired as a Post Office employee. Like many of you, I was a rebel in school and either flunked or quit high school a couple of times before finally graduating.

I was living in Detroit when I was about age 24, had quit a job I was unhappy with, and found a job on the loading docks of a small cartage company. I didn't know anything about the union, but it seemed like decent money. I joined the union through my own insistence, as my employer had a sweetheart agreement with 299 which allowed him to violate the union clause.

My first innocent encounter with the heavy handedness of the Teamster International came when I went to work one day and discovered that one of my co-workers (a guy about 50 years old) had been beaten up by Teamster goons the previous day. He was affiliated with a small rank and file group called the "Unity Committee" and they had dared to picket the 299 hall with demands for more democracy in the union. I decided at that point that I was no hero and I would keep my mouth shut.

I moved to Pittsburgh a few months later and tried to transfer into 249 to try and find a job. But, I had to get a job before I could transfer, so I took a minimum wage job at Robert Fulton Co. and helped to organize it into 249. I served as the elected Steward at Robert Fulton until I quit.

I then went to the 249 Trailer School, and a few months later, managed to get my time in at Consolidated. I have been working there ever since.

During all of this time, I had been involved in the anti-war movement. It was always clear to me that the Vietnam war benefited only the profit-pictures of the largest families and corporations, at the expense of many young, working-class lives.

I was also at that time involved deeply in the civil-rights movement and the fight for racial and sexual equality. I realized that divisions between people from racism and sexism were phony divisions that had been created by the rich folks to make sure that their workers kept on fighting each other. As long as we kept on fighting each other, we could not successfully fight our bosses.

During all of this period in my life, I remained a loner and didn't join any group. I wasn't sure if I was a socialist, but I knew I was too poor to be a capitalist. Slowly, but surely, I began to learn through my work experience and through my political activity, that the profit system wasn't for me. I had nothing to gain by defending my boss and his profits. I could gain only by fighting my boss and his desire for increased profits made at my expense.

I also began realizing that I could not fight alone. The only way this system could ever be challenged, the only way workers (including me) could ever get a fair break was to organize ourselves as workers, as members of the working class, to make certain demands upon our bosses.

In order for us to be able to do that, we have to have strong organizations that will fight for us, and that we democratically control. Those organizations must be our unions. But every time we turn around, we see Fitz making deals with the bosses.

Obviously, we need to build a movement that can return control of our unions to the rank and file. We can make our unions into fighting organizations again if we build a movement that can gain democratic control of them.

Today, I am proud to say that I am deeply involved in trying to build such a movement in the IBT. I have helped to start a paper in Local 249 and am one of the founding members of Teamsters for a Decent Contract.

Today, I am also proud to say that I am a socialist. I call myself that because I now realize that the only way we can finally end the kind of exploitation that most of us are forced to live under is to create an alternative system. That system must be socialism. In March of 1975, I joined an organization called the International Socialists (IS). I joined because the IS is an organization of workers that is committed to fighting for democratic control in every aspect of our lives. Unlike some other groups, I do not believe that workers democracy exists in either the Soviet Union or China. Rather, I believe that workers in those countries must also fight for control of their own lives.

Finally, I joined the IS because I believe (like the IS) in workers control, workers power, and workers democracy.

As a rank and file Teamster and as a socialist, I will continue to fight against the companies and sell-out union leaders because it is our union, our lives, and we have to live under the lousy deals they make. It is time for us to demand control over our own lives.

It is time for all of us to start fighting back.

Thank you for your time,
MEL PACKER